

Campbell (R.)

AN ESSAY

ON

EMPIRICAL REMEDIES;

READ BEFORE

THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA,

APRIL, 1852.

✓
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EMPIRICAL REMEDIES.

APPENDIX A.

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THE relationship sustained by Empiricism to Medical Science is indeed a pertinent one. As vice persists contrarious to virtue, so these two countervailing systems, in a moral sense, advance at variance; the one retarding the great interests of humanity, the other counteracting its pernicious sway; the former but one unconscionable scheme for coining guilty gain, the latter blest with divinity of purpose—the perfection of Science and its exercise through indiscriminate and self-sacrificing benevolence. Thus having defined its position to be at enmity with the generous design universally contemplated in the prosecution of all pure wisdom, we would consider charlatanry in the manner of its existence, and study the best, most practicable and efficient means for its suppression.

In considering the varied pursuits of life embraced in the grand reciprocating system of business operating throughout the world, we find quackery the inevitable concomitant of all human enterprise—a pretender to the success of genuine worth, assuming but the outward similitude of excellence to mislead the ignorant and

unwary, for the accomplishment of its mercenary designs—a veritable “wolf in sheep’s clothing!”

In all the walks of science there are none in which it enjoys so protean a character of existence, or has attained so high a degree of perfection and refinement as in medicine. Nor is there one in which the rank weed vegetates with more choking luxuriance, than in this. Here, it springs forth a huge, imposing stalk, overgrown by cultivation, branched and foliaged, and blooming in almost irresistible similitude with the genuine growth. Or rather—organizing into a specious philosophy, with laws to govern and intensely elaborated theories to vindicate its policy, it assumes the well-feigned dignity of a perfect system of scientific truth.

And here we find to flourish its every grade of development, from the more refined and plausible accomplishment of a pseudo-medical-philosophy, down to the most odious species of medical imposture.

It is but natural to inquire here, into the source of so great an evil—to investigate the conditions which may operate as determining causes in the production of so untoward a result as this commingling of medicine more than of any other system of truth, with its appropriate forms of empiricism, so as always to require the discrimination of the adept to decide concerning the merits of their respective pretensions.

The institution of Medicine is founded in an effort of man’s intellectual powers for the relief or mitigation of the infirmities allotted to man’s physical estate. Hence, this relation places him in an attitude of dependence upon the varied attributes of human nature, that unpar-

alleled incongruity of turbidness and purity of design. Here, we have humanity in its weakest, most unfortified position—overcome by disease, a suppliant for relief to all who profess to hold in hand the reins of its infirmities—an easy spoil for those of its kind, whom avarice prompts to prey upon misfortune. Thus, in the nature of the case, there exist here more facilities, and greater inducements for imposition, than can be found elsewhere.

It is remarkable, that the popular mind is more in darkness and error concerning the true principles of medical philosophy, than in any other sphere of knowledge appertaining to the welfare of mankind—more insight into other sciences being commonly attained in general education. This being so profound and complicated a system of learning, depending upon a just appreciation of so many intricate branches of science, and of the mutual dependencies and indispensable connexions between them, that popular notions of medicine are mostly, either erroneous deductions from a limited amount of information, or are imbibed from the declarations of charlatantry: which latter, are more easily comprehended and appropriated by the ignorant. Thus, the mass of mankind are not capable of discriminating between the true physician and the plausible quack, or of judging concerning the merits of their respective systems of medication. This cause also operates favorably for medical imposture generally.

The class of diseases termed incurable, and which in the present stage of therapeutical knowledge, must so be considered, and for aught we can divine, must ever so remain, furnishes a fertile field for the cultivation of

all varieties of empiricism. When Science, proudly scorning to dissemble, defines the limits of her sway, then Quackery, tempted of so rich a revenue, usurps the undisputed province.

We have thus attempted a partial analysis of the peculiar and necessary relationships of medical science, which circumstances we conceive to be sufficient to exert a determining agency in placing the comparative ascendancy of quackery in this, above that of any other engagement of life. And such influences, although apparently remote and indeterminate, must conduce ultimately to the origin and maintenance of its varied and numerous modes of manifestation, from the elimination and exhibition of those dainty dogmas so well calculated to captivate the capricious and the fanciful, down to the emission and appropriation of those vile products annually issued in missionary swarms, for a more universal application, and which are dignified by their worthy authors as "patent cures," and by us stigmatized as "Empirical Remedies." It is the latter class, that it is our duty here, particularly to consider.

Of all the heteroclitic systems of popular medication, this one weighs more heavily upon our profession as a responsibility, than any other—as it is more generally prevalent in all classes of society, and from its nature, possessed of greater malignity of power in its operation. It is the physician's lot alone, to be able to fathom the depth of so profound a mischief. And who can appreciate its portentous character as a growing evil, without being shocked and pained at its too palpable significance?

From the position awarded him, by right of his education in the premises, he can survey, as an arbiter of human health and life, the field of man's interest, and scan with a knowing eye the conflicting agencies which are warring upon it. By virtue of his office, too, there reposes in him, the only hope of remedying this mighty evil, by delivering society, the dupe of fraud, from the degrading and perilous thralldom into which its ignorance and credulity have betrayed it. It devolves upon us then, to search out its causes, to discover the agencies which are tributary to its support and success, and devise, if possible, some sure means for their removal or frustration.

It may not be considered inapposite first, to notice a few of the artful devices which characterize the policy of the "nostrum trade." The rationale of this system of quackery, and of its prosecution upon so extended a scale, appears very simple. In every pursuit of life, whether high or low, where indolence and avarice incite the mind to conjure up some royal road to fortune, it requires but little penetration and reasoning for the adventurer to perceive, that in the extensive sphere of popular dupeability, he is presented with an inviting theatre for profitable speculation. The success of predecessor nostrum dealers tempts him to embark in a traffic whose capital is but the outlay of truth and honor; whose perquisite is easy gain. Hence, to determine upon some medium in which to embody and disseminate the nefarious project, is the purpose, it matters little whether it be a virulent poison (if not too rapid a one,) or a harmless confectionary, some convenient or pala-

table nostrum is produced either originally, or from a stolen formula vamped into a more acceptable form. Next, it is necessary to attract popular attention to the adjusted bait—and some most startling phrase, wrought out of flaming words, is appended to it for a name; and upon the merits of this name depends, in great measure, the future prospect for success. “DEAD SHOT” and “PAIN KILLER” are terms of irresistible import to the popular comprehension. And such phrases are in so great demand, that the language has been completely drained of all the heroic terms which might be pressed into this illegitimate and unhallowed service; so much so that the more recent conscriptions are but far-fetched and insignificant expressions, which fall with forced but feeble enunciation on the public ear. Such is the latest style, embracing an action of empiricism against pain. The “*Pain Stopper*,” we apprehend, has fallen still-born into light, for want of a nomenclatural vitality. And here, we may inquire if the discovery, by our science, of her several anæsthetic agents, might not have aroused the spirit of emulation in her evil genius, which has prompted her to summon up to her aid the “*Pain Killer*,” “*Pain Extractor*,” “*Pain Eradicator*,” “*Pain Stopper*,” &c., etc.—in her recent foray upon this important quarter?

The system of publication, which constitutes so indispensable an auxiliary in the economy of this species of commerce, is no less imposing in its artful design and elaborate and comprehensive inditement, than is the scheme of its nomenclature. Every one is made familiar, through the columns of every newspaper, with

the strenuous puffing—the irresistible stress of gas, so offensive to reason, with which these unscrupulous mountebanks are accustomed to inflate the astounding attributes of their noxious panaceas. In addition to the prostitution of the columns of almost every daily and weekly gazette throughout the country, by the introduction of paragraphs fraught with subtle chicanery and enormous mendacity, society in every condition is besieged by the audacious obtrusion of their lying placards, handbills, circulars, and every variety of advertisement, artfully adapted to the comprehension of every class; or shrouded in a maze of unintelligible jargon of misapplied or misquoted medical technicalities, which never fail to secure, through the magic power of mystery, the faith and advocacy of their illiterate and superstitious victims. For example, “Bristol’s Sarsaparilla Circular” presents the report of a very formidable case of “SEPTUM NOSI,” miraculously cured by this infallible drug.

Another mode of quack advertisement worthy of notice, as an instance of high attainment in accomplished artifice and crafty ingenuity, is the construction of the “Family Almanac,” which is a compilation of nostrum advertisements, almanac intelligence, and reports of wonderful cures—interspersed with glaring wood-cut caricatures of the hideous lineaments of dire disease, so skillfully intermingled as unavoidably to arrest the attention and curiosity of every reader.

Finally, the operation of controlling and vitiating the public mind by the sophistry and falsehood of charlatanry, represents the principal exercise of this pernicious

business. And when success will warrant, it is dealt in to almost an incredible amount of expenditure. It is estimated that the notorious Morrison appropriated, between the years of 1830 and 1844, the enormous sum of \$540,000 to the advertisement of his nostrum.

The evil influence exerted upon society by such a perversion of the controlling energies of the public press, is necessarily deeply felt, wherever such an abuse is tolerated. It appears to have been appreciated by the French government, when in 1846 an ordinance was issued in Paris and every city throughout the kingdom, "that no bills or placards announcing the treatment of any disease by particular individuals, or the sale of any particular medicines, should be posted on the walls, or otherwise exposed to public view; and further, that none of the public newspapers should insert any such announcements in their advertisements or otherwise." How wise and efficient a measure was this, for the protection of the commonwealth!

All the manœuvring diplomacy of the nostrum vender, in concerting his pretenses favorably for public acceptance, however plausible and inviting, would often be regarded with much of suspicion and discredit, especially by the more discerning, were they not substantiated by the endorsement of some more accredited authority. Hence it is a great desideratum with him to procure, by some means or other, testimonials of high sounding name and respectability, to furnish a semblance of truth and dignity to his unwarrantable representations. These are often to be regarded as complete of the one consistent scheme of fraud—the product of an extension of

the same ingenuity and falsity pervading the whole procedure: having, in many instances, forged to them names of the most indubitable integrity of professional honor; or names which, perhaps, have long since existed only in the office of a pure and irreproachable memory. But alas! they too often may triumph in the sanction of a genuine, a living authenticity.

Having determined what are the agencies which lend their influence to the furtherance of so deplorable an evil, this brings us to consider who are the abettors of this pernicious vice. It appears from no inconsiderable inquiry, that this serious charge, strange to say, is most unanimously preferred against those whose positions in the community would entitle them to be styled the governing intelligences of the popular mind, as they are those whose intellectual pursuits in life should command for them the deference due to an enlightened discrimination. Thus, the Clerical, the Editorial and the Medical professions are principally condemned, as being *participes criminis*, in this unworthy enterprise.

The Clergy are proverbially the supporters of quackery, and appear to evince a particular approbation of secret or "patent cures," in preference to medical aid derived from a more legitimate source, should we judge from the frequency with which reverend names are to be found appended to laudatory certificates in their favor. But this *prima facie* evidence, we are persuaded, leads to too harsh a decision in this case. For when we consider the moral capacity of the empiric, to compass any means necessary for the attainment of his ends, and the desirable character of such testimony from the

confidence generally imposed in the members of this profession, for integrity and intelligence, we are prepared to make a liberal allowance in their behalf. But, we would not excuse those of this order, who from weakness, ignorance or conceit—in a craven spirit of compliance, or through a blind obsequiousness to the claims of designing flattery, do thus compromise the dignity of their high calling and prove recreant to the cause of truth and the interests of humanity. These, though they need our pity, demand our reprobation.

It is everywhere complained, “that the public press, the mind-governing power of the masses, venal and prostitute, is the mercenary of charlatan impostors, aiding them to prey on Society, to corrupt morals and to disseminate falsehood.”* This, in effect, appears to be sadly true! But why is it so? The press, the passive medium of communication, subservient to the wishes, the interest, the welfare of society, opens its impartial columns and wide extended circulation, for promulgating information purporting to contribute to the benefit of mankind. What, if the charlatan should there obtrude his claims—extol the efficacy, the advantages of his medication, giving it currency under a counterfeit exposition of the laws of health and disease, which he artfully drafts in accordance with the uneducated appreciation of the non-medical mind! Can we look to the editor, in this case, to decide upon the injurious qualities of the drug—so well testimonialized as it generally is; or to determine the heterodoxy of the principles set forth? Can we expect him to appreciate the intimate relation-

* Prof. S. Jackson—Medical Reform.

ships of remedial means to the intricate derangements in the economy of the human organism? Physicians, the proper judiciaries, have not essayed to gain-say them, and our silence is interpreted by the editor—as by the people, as an evidence of admission, if not approbation, of the merit and truth of the system. He himself is duped and errs unwittingly. It is true, that he is paid for such advertisements—so is he well paid for advertising generally. But his columns are alike open to the advocacy of true medical science, and the exposure of the fraud and subversion of the influence of quackery ; and it but remains for us to employ them.

It is generally urged, and with a humiliating degree of justice, that in the laxity and corruptness of the ethical condition of our own profession, there obtains a dominant influence for countenancing and promoting the production and employment of quack and patented remedies. And here, we are constrained to acknowledge, that, whether from dereliction of duty, in neglecting the employment of efforts necessary for combatting the evil ; or from an actual instrumentality in its cause, the burthen of the offence weighs decidedly within the pale of the medical profession. We are prone to regard quackery, in its wide-spread and rapidly increasing operation, with a bearing of complaisant regret and supine resignation, as a necessary and inevitable event. And thus, by an easy gradation, some attain to a lenient forbearance and finally, acquiescence in its polluting embrace. We daily allow instances of its pernicious and oftentimes murderous enactments to pass unchallenged and unimproved, for its exposure and conviction.

Such is an instance of neglect of the measures which might be wielded in its opposition, and which, in itself may be considered reprehensible in us, as the proper guardians of the hygienic interests of the community. But the offence of delinquency may be regarded as of inconsiderable moment, when compared with the more glaring evidences of disregard and infraction of the very fundamental and necessary requisitions, implied in the terms of our professional morality, and of which, so many, who claim legitimacy in the Hippocratic lineage, are to be found guilty. For there are many among us, who testimonialize for quacks, or who are engaged in the sale of their nostrums, or who, without ascertaining their composition, prescribe them in their practice ; and there are still some, who are so fallen and degenerate, as to have alienated themselves from the profession, and forfeited their claims to its respectability and privileges, by enlisting in the *legion of quackery*, with a shameless avowal of their authorship or proprietorship of some secret or patent drug. These are certainly, potent influences derived from the medical profession, which in its members are more inexcusable, inasmuch as it is not in every case, that they can honestly plead ignorance, as an amelioration of their crime.

The aid contributed by the Apothecary, in the exposure and sale of nostrums, likewise furnishes a considerable influence towards the success of this business. And some, not satisfied with the fair profits of so lucrative an agency, must play a more active and extensive part in the speculation. Many a physician's valuable formula is made subservient to this perverted purpose,

being set off with *ad captandum* name, and adorned with every quack embellishment of which a drug is susceptible, with specific directions for use, and confident recommendations, as the cure of all incurable diseases.

This is, at least, a compromise of the reciprocating relationship they sustain to our profession, to say nothing of the arrant presumption and intrinsic immorality of the proceeding.

Lastly, the very foundation of all empirical systems, and more especially of quackery in this form, and its greatest sustaining influence may be referred to the construction and operation of the administrative regulations of our country, in their bearing upon this point. Here, indeed, is its strong hold—the grand constitutional basis on which it is founded; from which it has derived its origin and derives its existence, and upon which it depends for protection and encouragement. The existence and exercise of the *patent law* in its application to remedial agents, guarantees the legality and constitutionality of the system. Besides encouraging the production, by protecting the right of manufacturing and vending these compounds, the exercise of this law does much, in prejudicing the popular mind in their favor—as a patent is received as an assurance of the superior, tested qualities of the drug.

The difficulty of concerting any plan of prosecution, which would promise success, in remedying this important evil—so extensively prevalent and securely established as it is in our country—must be apparent to every one. It would seem, that the adoption of measures,

which would meet it in all the conditions of its existence, (if it were possible to devise them,) and which would operate gradually, but certainly for the removal of the causes on which it depends, would furnish the only hope of a successful encounter.

It is evident, that the principal elements of its existence consist in 1st, The general ignorance pervading the public, on all medical subjects; and 2nd, The imperfect and indiscreet arrangement of the legislative regulations of this country, concerning subjects of medical interest.

Any arrangement to operate successfully, must first secure great concert of energetic action in the profession, and the engagement of its most influential authorities.

The PLAN which we would respectfully suggest for your consideration, and which, in our humble opinion, appears to meet the two most prominent indications presented, is—

1st. The establishment of an efficient Standing Committee in this Body, whose duty it shall be, with the assistance of the general Society, to collect and publish, as far as practicable, through the popular channels of intelligence, all the instances of the pernicious effects, resulting from the employment of empirical remedies, which may come under the observation of the Society—*for the advisement of the people.*

And, 2nd. Let it be the duty of said Committee to present a Report of the facts, thus collected, at the annual meetings of the American Medical Association; soliciting their recommendation of such a plan to the

several State Medical Societies and Associations of the Union—for the purpose of accumulating evidence sufficient for the arraignment of this injurious system, as a national grievance. And also, for this Committee to solicit the interference of the National Association, as the highest Medical intelligence, in memorializing the National Congress, as the highest legislative authority of our country, for the abolition of that portion of the "Patent-law," referring to secret remedies, and petitioning the suppression and prevention of such medicines, by whatever additional measures, which that authority may deem proper to adopt—the evidence of the joint Report of the several State Committees, being adduced as the reasonable apology for such an application.

Respectfully submitted.

ROBERT CAMPBELL, M. D.,
Chairman.

Augusta, Ga., April 14th, 1852.



